## News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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## **Health Official Concerned About Increased Tularemia Activity**

CHEYENNE ó A Wyoming Department of Health official today expressed concern about possible increased activity this year for tularemia, an infectious disease that animals and insects can spread to humans.

Tularemia, also known as õrabbit feverö or õdeer fly fever,ö is a bacterial infectious disease that typically affects rabbits, hares and rodents. Other mammals, including domestic animals, can also become infected.

õWeøve had reports this year of large rabbit die offs in a number of areas around the state,ö said Dr. Jaime Snow, state public health veterinarian with the Department of Health. A woman in Baggs who was bitten by a cat and a male youth in Lovell who recently skinned a rabbit are both believed to have contracted the disease. In addition, three cats, one foal and one cottontail rabbit have tested positive for the disease at the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory.

People typically acquire tularemia when bit by an infected tick, deer fly, horse fly or mosquito; by handling infected animals (especially rabbits or rodents); or through ingestion or contact with untreated, contaminated water or insufficiently cooked meat.

Human signs and symptoms of tularemia can include skin ulcers, swollen and painful lymph glands, inflamed eyes, sore throat, mouth sores, diarrhea or pneumonia. If the bacteria are inhaled, symptoms can include abrupt onset of fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, joint pain, dry cough and progressive weakness.

õTularemia can be fatal if the person is not treated,ö Snow said. õPeople who become ill after an insect or tick bite, after handling a sick or dead animal should contact their healthcare provider.ö

Snow suggested several precautions that can help reduce the risk of tularemia infection:

- \*Avoid bathing, swimming or working in untreated water and avoid drinking untreated water.
- \*Avoid handling rabbits, squirrels or other animals that appear sick.
- \*Wear rubber gloves when skinning animals, especially rabbits and squirrels; skin \*animals in a well-ventilated area.
- \*Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling sick or dead animals.
- \*Cook meat thoroughly before eating, especially rabbit and squirrel.
- \*Use measures such as insect repellent and protective clothing to prevent insect bites.